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DE RUEHAK #0932/01 1091415
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1797
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RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 7998
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2552
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RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 5868
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JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 2007

In Today's Papers

Attackers Kill Three at Christian Publishing House in Malatya
All papers report on the brutal murders of three employees of Christian literature publisher Zirve in the eastern city of Malatya. The killers bound the hands and feet of the victims, German citizen Tilman Ekkehart Geske (46), Necati Aydin (35) and Ugur Yuksel, and then slit their throats. Five suspects between the ages of 19 and 20 were detained. Sources said that all five were students preparing for university entrance exams, living in a dormitory in Malatya. Mainstream Hurriyet reports the suspects said in initial questioning they carried out the killing for the "homeland."

Prime Minister Erdogan told the press yesterday the incident in Malatya was "savagery." "We are deeply saddened by the terror in Malatya," said Erdogan, adding those responsible will be brought to justice. Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul strongly condemned the attack before leaving for Belgrade on Thursday to attend a foreign ministers meeting of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC). "We strongly condemn the attack which actually targeted Turkey's long-standing tradition of tolerance. We are extremely uneasy about such events which harm Turkey's image in the world." The German government condemned "in the sharpest manner" the murderous attack. Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier called on Turkish authorities to do everything "to bring those responsible to justice." "The circumstances of this incident must be brought to light," said Steinmeier. Terry Davis, Secretary General of Council of Europe, strongly condemned the attack which "seems to have religious grounds."

Mainstream Milliyet, under the headline "The nightmare continues," links the killings to the murder of Roman Catholic priest Andrea Santoro in the Black Sea town of Trabzon and the killing of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink. Mainstream Vatan believes the youngsters were manipulated by "dark forces." The intellectual/Islamist-oriented Zaman describes the killings as "provocation." Zaman columnist Ali Bulac argues the incident was a

"provocation" related to the upcoming presidential elections, saying the ruling pro-Islamist AKP government was being "dragged into an environment of violence, provocation and lack of tolerance." The economic-political daily Referans columnist Cengiz Candar calls the murders a result of growing hatred and efforts to hush up the killing of Dink as well as attempts to disrupt the presidential elections via illegal means.

Gungor Mengi comments in the mainstream daily Vatan: "Given the recent events, Turkey is doomed to get labeled as a hell for believers in non-Islamic faiths. The gruesome murder in Malatya will undoubtedly provoke anti-Turkey sentiment in its all forms in the Christian world. There is another strange thing about this murder. There were no protective measures for the victims even though the constant death threats against these people were known by the authorities. The intelligence units of Turkey are incapable of saving the lives of our citizens and undermine Turkey's prestige at the same time. The suspects will be arrested but it is unlikely that the real perpetrators which transform 18-year-old youngsters into bloody murderers will be caught. When will that hideous ghost [the unknown "real perpetrators"] stop betraying Turkey and the Muslims?"

AKP Asks Erdogan to Stay on as PM

All papers report the ruling AK Party executive board gave Prime Minister Erdogan full authority to pick the party's candidate in the presidential election. Papers say approximately 30 members of a 50-member party board want Erdogan to stay on as prime minister but will support him if he decides to run for president. Analysts say without Erdogan the AK Party fears losing votes in the forthcoming parliamentary elections in November. The PM said he will announce a candidate on April 24 or 25. Erdogan is expected to make his decision after weekend talks with Parliament Speaker Bulent Arinc

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and Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul.

Ralston: Turkey Will Enter Iraq if PKK is not Stopped

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report on a Washington Post op-ed by David Ignatius claiming US special anti-terror envoy Joseph Ralston told the Bush administration that at the end of April, Turkey will enter about eight miles into northern Iraq if the PKK is not stopped. Ralston's Turkish counterpart Edip Baser told NTV that he conveyed to Ralston a personal view that Turkey's patience is about to run out, adding Turkey is left without much option. "I did not set a definite date, like the end of April, but I said 'in a month,' -- which corresponds to the end of April."

Court Acquits Policemen over Killing Kurdish Father, Son

Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report a Turkish court acquitted four policemen on Wednesday of charges of manslaughter over the deaths of a father, Ahmet Kaymaz, and his 12-year-old son, Ugur, in Kiziltepe in the southeastern province of Mardin in 2004. Police had said the two died accidentally in front of their home at Kiziltepe during a firefight with the PKK militants. The four policemen were first removed from their posts after the killings but were then reassigned to different provinces. The EU had expressed concern at the killings at the time and urged a full investigation. Critics said the case demonstrated the authorities' tolerance to security forces' illegitimate actions in the mainly Kurdish region.

Court Rejects Erdogan Charge against Humor Magazine

The leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports a court in Ankara rejected Prime Minister Erdogan's application for a lawsuit to be filed against the weekly humor magazine Leman, asking for compensation for drawing the PM as a tick sucking Turkey's blood.

TV Highlights
NTV, 6.00 A.M.

Domestic News

- Former mayor of Ankara and deputy speaker of the parliament Ali Dincer dies at age 62 from an infection, four months after receiving

a liver transplant.

- Opposition leader Erkan Mumcu said Anavatan Party and DYP agree to form an alliance during the general elections.

- On Thursday, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul will travel to Belgrade for a meeting of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization. Gul is expected to meet his Greek counterpart Dora Bakoyannis on the sidelines of the summit.

- Standard & Poors director Farouk Soussa said Prime Minister Erdogan becoming Turkey's new president will not be a surprise.

International News

- General Yasar Buyukanit, chief of the Turkish General Staff, said Turkish military flights over the Aegean were conducted within the framework of international laws, adding violation of the Greek airspace was out of the question.

- UNHCR will discuss with Turkey and Iraq the closure of Makhmour refugee camp in northern Iraq at a meeting Friday in Geneva.

- Kurdistan regional administration prime minister Nechirvan Barzani said Ankara should consider a general amnesty for PKK militants to lay down their arms and return to Turkey, allowing them to participate in the political process in Turkey.

- US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said failure in Iraq would

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unleash sectarian strife and extremism and would be felt first in the Middle East.

WILSON